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Questions on Kennedy killing

Explanation given but no so Real reason development in Vietnam

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At 12:30 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Tex. In Part One of this article, published last week, I explored some of the questions about the assassination and related events that appear now to have been answered satisfactorily. In this, Part Two of the article, I shall examine a few of the major questions about the assassination and related events [including the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, allegedly the President's assassin] that I believe remain unanswered.

Who were the members of the conspiracy that planned and carried out the assassination of President Kennedy? That President Kennedy was assassinated as a result of a conspiracy seems indisputable in view of the following: (1) shots were fired at the President's motorcade from more than one location; (2) plenty of eyewitnesses saw suspicious persons in and around Dealey Plaza before, during, and immediately after the assassination; (3) during the months preceding November, 1963, different law enforcement agencies around the country received from different sources information that a plot had been formed to kill the President by shooting him from a building with a high-powered rifle (and indeed, a Presidential visit to Chicago in early November, 1963, was cancelled because of assassination threats); (4) persons posing as Secret Service agents and carrying false credentials were present at the assassination scene; (5) certain suspicious individuals were actually detained by the Dallas police at the assassination scene For example, Eugene Hale Brading, aka Jim Braden, an individual with a record of serious criminal convictions and connections with the highest echelons of organized crime. (See the *Final Report* of the House Assassinations Committee.)

Brading was taken into temporary custody shortly after the assassination when he was found in the Dal-Tex building, directly across the street from the School Book Depository; and (6) during the weeks immediately before the assassination, one or more impostors were busy in the Dallas vicinity impersonating Oswald, often carrying a rifle. The question is, what was the membership of the conspiracy?

This question is not presently answerable. There were a number of groups or organizations with both the motive and the ability to assassinate the President, and any one or more of these might have been involved in the assassination. To begin with, there was organized crime. The Mafia wanted to kill President Kennedy because his brother Robert, the Attorney General, was waging a relentless new battle on organized crime; because the Mafia blamed President Kennedy for failing to recapture Cuba where prior to Castro the mob had made huge profits from the Havana casinos and resorts (it should be remembered that in the 1960s the Mafia had engaged with the CIA in several plots to kill Castro); and because of the bitter antipathy between Robert F. Kennedy (who would be "just another lawyer" if the President died) and Jimmy Hoffa of the teamsters Union, which was closely allied with organized crime.

> *"...there are a lot of mysterious or suspicious circumstances regarding the Tippett murder."*

Secondly, the Cuban intelligence and secret police agencies (with or without the assistance of the Soviet Secret police, the KGB) might have carried out the assassination in retaliation for the CIA-Mafia plots against Castro. In fact, in a press interview on Sept. 7, 1963, Castro said: "United States leaders should think that if they are aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe," and thereafter a secret U.S. government committee responsible for formulating plans for dealing with Cuba prepared a memorandum noting the possibility that the Cubans might carry out attacks on U.S. officials.

Third, there were the anti-Castro Cubans who had been involved in the Bay of Pigs mission and other U.S.-sponsored actions to attack Castro's Cuba and who regarded President Kennedy as a traitor and a betrayer of the movement to liberate Cuba from Castro. The fierce and violent hatred of the anti-Castro Cubans for the President is notorious and well-documented.

Fourth, there were various members and ex-members of the American intelligence community who shared the politics of (and often had worked with) the anti-Castro Cubans, or who for other or additional reasons regarded President Kennedy as soft on communism, or pro-pacifistic, or unwilling to support America's allies. American intelligence agents, throughout the mid-1960s, had been involved in numerous assassination plots against various foreign leaders. (See *Interim Report* of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Alleged Assassination Plots Against Foreign Leaders.") They had teamed up with the Mafia to try to kill Castro. Probably they were involved in the Nov. 1, 1963, overthrow and assassination of the President of South Vietnam, Diem, and his brother.

Of course, it is always possible that the membership of the conspiracy consisted of unknown persons not affiliated with any of the above groups. If this was the case, the conspiracy was probably small in number, and it is doubtful that the identity of the conspirators ever will be learned.

In its 1979 *Final Report* the House Assassinations Committee absolved the Soviet government, the Cuban government, the Secret Service, the FBI and the CIA from involvement in the assassination of President Kennedy. The committee concluded, however, that the evidence did not preclude the possibility that individual members of anti-Castro Cuban groups or individual members of organized crime were involved in the assassination. Jim Garrison, the former New Orleans district attorney, who unsuccessfully prosecuted several persons for allegedly being involved in the assassination, concluded that the President was killed by a conspiracy consisting of persons on the periphery of the American intelligence and military community, perhaps assisted by anti-Castro Cubans. Although there is insufficient space here for a factual explanation, my own view is that the conspiracy probably consisted of a small group of American intelligence operatives, anti-Castro Cubans and Mafia members who had worked together in the past to kill others.

Did Lee Harvey Oswald shoot President Kennedy? Both the Warren Commission in 1964 and the House Assassinations Committee in 1979 concluded that Oswald shot the President with an old, cheap 6.5 mm. Mannlicher-Carcano Italian rifle allegedly found hidden on the sixth floor of the School Book Depository minutes after the assassination. Since no eyewitness could identify the person or persons firing from the Depository and there was no other direct evidence, the conclusion that Oswald shot the President rested on circumstantial

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evidence, including most importantly: (1) Oswald owned the rifle; (2) a bullet fired from the rifle was found on a stretcher at the hospital where the President and Governor Connally were rushed; (3) Oswald's palmprint was found on the rifle and his fingerprints were found on boxes in the sixth floor where the rifle was supposedly found and from which the shots were allegedly fired; (4) fragments from a bullet fired from the rifle were found in the Presidential limousine after the assassination; and (5) three empty cartridge cases allegedly found near the rifle had been fired from the rifle.

Certainly this evidence is highly incriminating to Oswald, but I must note that none of it really proves that Oswald fired the rifle; stated differently, the circumstantial evidence does not tell us who fired the rifle, but at most only that a particular rifle (belonging to Oswald) was used and that Oswald had handled the rifle. Moreover, not all of this inculpatory circumstantial evidence is as strong or as reliable as one might think. The following facts make it doubtful that the rifle said to have been found on the sixth floor was Oswald's: (1) although there was no evidence that Oswald wore gloves or cleaned the rifle or the cartridges with cloth, none of his fingerprints was found on the rifle itself or the cartridge cases; (2) the so-called palmprint was found under suspicious circumstances, not photographed (in violation of regulations) and reported late, and at any rate the palmprint was under the barrel and could have been placed there only when the rifle was disassembled; (3) the rifle said to have been on the sixth floor was of a different length than the rifle Oswald supposedly ordered in his own handwriting from a mail-order house; (4) although both the rifle allegedly shipped to Oswald's post office box and the sixth floor rifle bore the same serial number (C2766), the fact remains that there is a definite possibility that other similar or identical 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifles bear the same serial number, and therefore it is not certain that the rifle ordered and the rifle found are the same rifle; and (5) the famous photographs supposedly showing Oswald holding the rifle later found in the sixth floor may not be genuine, and even if genuine are suspicious. I will also note that circumstantial evidence surrounding the finding of the stretcher bullet at the hospital are suspicious and contradictory, and the bullet may have been planted. That Oswald's prints were found on boxes on the sixth floor is hardly suspicious; he worked there moving boxes as part of his job.

There are still other reasons for doubting that Oswald was the assassin. For example, Oswald was not a sufficiently good marksman to have shot the President with this rifle from the sixth floor. I also observe that after the assassination he did not behave the way we would expect a Presidential assassin to act. Unlike virtually all previous persons who have shot and killed American presidents, Oswald did not glory in the deed; he firmly and repeatedly denied that he had shot the President. I conclude that it is not established one way or another whether Oswald shot President Kennedy.

Did Lee Harvey Oswald shoot Officer Tippett? Both the Warren Commission and the House Assassinations committee found that sometime between 1 p.m. and 1:20 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1963—that is, 30 to 45 minutes after the President was shot—Lee Harvey Oswald shot Dallas Police Officer J.D. Tippett to death with a pistol Oswald was still carrying when he was arrested shortly thereafter in a motion picture theater. Both the Warren Commission and the Assassination Committee found that Oswald's killing of Tippett was additional circumstantial evidence that Oswald shot President Kennedy.

For the reasons that follow, I do not think that the evidence is sufficient to conclude that Oswald shot Tippett. First, there was no reliable eyewitness testimony identifying Oswald as Tippett's killer. There was some testimony by witnesses that there were two killers, and that at least one of them fled in an automobile (Oswald could not drive.) Second, the experts have tried but have been unable to prove that the bullets removed from Tippett's body were fired from Oswald's gun (the barrel of which had been conveniently modified with the result it did not leave identifiable marks on bullets fired). Third, there is a discrepancy between the cartridge cases conveniently left at the scene of the Tippett killing and the bullets found in Tippett's body. Of the four shells found at the site of Tippett's death, two were Western .38s and two were Remington-Peters .38s: of the four bullets removed from Tippett's body, three were Westerns and one was a Remington-Peters.

I note further that there are a lot of mysterious or suspicious circumstances surrounding the Tippett murder. First, there has never been adduced a satisfactory explanation of why Tippett was where he was at the time he was killed, and the police log transcripts produced to explain this matter are internally contradictory, incomplete and bear signs of having been altered or tampered with. (See Sylvia A. Meagher, *Accessories After the Fact*, 1967.)

Second, it has not been satisfactorily explained why Oswald (if indeed he was Tippett's killer) was at the place where Tippett was killed when the killing occurred. Third, there has not been an adequate investigation of Tippett's prior life or his possible previous connections with Oswald, Jack Ruby, or persons connected with Oswald or Ruby.

Thus, I conclude that there is not sufficient evidence one way or another to answer whether Oswald shot Tippett.

Was Lee Harvey Oswald killed as a result of a conspiracy to silence him? Jack Ruby shot and killed Oswald, a police prisoner, in the basement of the Dallas City Jail at 11:21 a.m. on Nov. 24, 1963, less than 48 hours after the assassination of President Kennedy. Speculation immediately arose that Oswald had been killed as a result of a conspiracy to prevent Oswald from talking. The Warren Commission found that Ruby had acted alone when he shot Oswald and accepted Ruby's assertion that he acted out of grief, anger, and sympathy for the dead President's family. The commission found no prior connection between Oswald and Ruby; it also found that Ruby had no significant affiliations with organized crime, although it did acknowledge that the Chicago-born Ruby had been involved in criminal activities with criminal elements.

The House Assassinations Committee recognized that the Warren Commission's investigation of Ruby's background had been incomplete. The committee found larger and more sinister ties between Ruby and the Mafia than the Warren Commission had. Hence it concluded that "Ruby's shooting of Oswald was not a spontaneous act, in that it involved at least some premeditation;" and the Committee also thought it more likely that Ruby had entered the basement with the assistance or the connivance of the Dallas police.

I consider it likely but not proven that Ruby conspired with organized crime to murder Oswald. Here are some of the reasons. First, Ruby's involvement in organized crime was quite deep and stretched back over many years. He had visited Cuba in the 1950s and early 1960s, apparently in behalf of the mob, and once had visited Santos Trafficante, the notorious Mafia don, there. Second, Ruby's contacts (both in person and by telephone) with Mafia hitmen and other violent gangsters increased suspiciously and dramatically during the period immediately preceding Nov. 22 and continued up to the shooting of Oswald. Third, shortly before killing Oswald Ruby, usually short of cash and plagued by debts, acquired large sums of money. A complete statement of the facts now known about Ruby's ties to the Mafia may be found in Seth Kantor's book *Who Was Jack Ruby?*, published in 1978, and in G. Robert Blakey's book *The Plot to Kill the President*, published in 1981. (Blakey was general counsel to the House Assassinations Committee and is a recognized expert on organized crime.)

Assuming that Ruby's actions were the result of a conspiracy, it is still unclear whether the conspiracy to silence Oswald was the same conspiracy that plotted to kill President Kennedy. It is certainly conceivable that the two conspiracies were separate but related.